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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAKU 001463

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FOR EUR/CARC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/11/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [KIRF](#) [AJ](#)
SUBJECT: BAKU POLICE BREAK-UP SEVENTH DAY ADVENTIST WORSHIP
SERVICE

REF: A. BAKU 01276

[1](#)B. BAKU 01029

[1](#)C. BAKU 00794

Classified By: Pol/Econ Chief Joan Polaschik for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (SBU) According to Seventh Day Adventist Pastor Ivan Zavrichko, five to six police officers broke up a gathering of approximately twenty Seventh Day Adventists on December 8.

Zavrichko said the group was conducting a religious service in a personal apartment near the Gara Garayev metro station in Baku; police claimed the gathering was illegal because the congregation was not registered. (NOTE: The main Seventh Day Adventist Church in Baku's Ganclik neighborhood is registered, but not this particular congregation, which is considered a branch of the main church. Zavrichko, the pastor of the main Adventist church, told us the Adventists had sent a request to the State Committee for Work with Religious Associations (SCWRA) to hold the service several days before December 8, but they had not heard anything from the SCWRA.)

[1](#)2. (C) According to Zavrichko, the police arrested eight Adventists -- including the local pastor, Rasim Bakhshiyev -- and detained them for approximately eight hours at the 25th police department. The eight Adventists have been released, although Bakhshiyev was fined 16.5 Azerbaijani manat (19.5 USD) and the other members were fined 11 manat (13 USD). Several of the arrestees had to sign a document acknowledging that the gathering was illegal and stating they would abstain from converting to another religion. Bakhshiyev and Zavrichko told us the police were verbally abusive of the detained members, but the police were not physically abusive.

The pastors said the police verbally assaulted the Adventists, who were Azerbaijanis, for betraying Islam. The police also confiscated some literature from the service to determine whether it was legal.

[1](#)3. (C) Comment: Since 1991, the GOAJ periodically steps up pressure against select religious groups, especially those communities the GOAJ perceives as "untraditional." (NOTE: The GOAJ believes the "traditional" religious communities are Muslims -- as regulated by the Caucasus Muslim Board -- Jews, the Russian Orthodox church, and several other smaller Christian groups. Per reftel accounts of GOAJ pressure against several Protestant groups, it appears that the GOAJ is engaging in one of its periodic efforts selectively to harass some religious groups. We also note that the Ambassador attended a service at the main Seventh Day Adventist church several weeks ago. We have no evidence that the breakup of the December 8 service was linked to the

Ambassador's attendance at the main church.
DERSE